

Career Path

Selling points

by Maggie Tang



Johnny Ng, sales
director
Magazines
International (Asia)
Limited
Photo: Johnny Kwok

Strategist, compassionate leader, and bridge between the sales team and top management are all roles that Johnny Ng performs in his position as sales director at Magazines International (Asia) Limited, the sole agent for a wide range of well-known international magazines.

Mr Ng joined Magazines International in 2001 as an account executive whose daily routine consisted of sales calls and visits. His responsibilities have increased since then and today he oversees six large sales teams of more than 250 staff. Instead of bowing to the pressure, he embraces the challenges that his job brings. "I didn't have any experience in magazine subscriptions when I joined the company, but this wasn't a disadvantage as I'm a self-motivated learner, so I was able to pick up the necessary skills within a short period of time," he says.

Right skills

There is a common misperception that an outgoing personality is crucial to excel in a sales-oriented career, but Mr Ng disagrees, saying, "It takes me a while to warm up to strangers, so I am not the type of sociable person that people often associate with sales." However, this has never been a hurdle. His personal opinion is that, in order to succeed, it is essential that sales professionals are sincere in all their dealings with both clients and colleagues.

He also notes that the ability to sell is not inborn but a learnt skill. "Selling is a complicated process involving sophisticated communication skills, persuasive presentation abilities and a flair for strategic negotiation," he explains. Therefore, sales professionals at Magazines International receive ongoing industry-specific training to acquire necessary selling skills, which are then reinforced through coaching with the sales teams. New staff also receives product knowledge training before they start making sales calls. "A salesperson must be knowledgeable about both the company and its product line," he adds.

Considering that sales professionals have a mission to meet customer needs, they must also be detail-oriented and be able to respond promptly to customer requests. A high EQ (emotional quotient) and AQ (adversity quotient) are absolutely essential, Mr Ng remarks. Sales professionals inevitably have to face rejection and disappointment, which can be extremely stressful and even lead to a strong sense of dejection. "You must be resilient," he stresses, noting also that encouragement fuels the will to move forward.

Positive mind

Team leaders at the company counsel and coach their account executives to help them remain positive, confident and enthusiastic about their targets. Mr Ng believes it is important that he is always there when his staff needs him. "It is common to see salespeople on an emotional rollercoaster. At Magazines International, we are lucky to have a caring and supportive environment, where everybody feels respected and cared for. There is a strong bond between all of us," he remarks.

While striving to meet targets is still part of a sales executive's working life, the company focuses

increasingly on the amount of effort staff put into their jobs during performance evaluations. "Our motto is 'you can make it if you try', a policy we appreciate very much. I'm confident that if staff members work on the skills we teach them, they have the tools to become successful sales professionals," Mr Ng emphasises.

To help staff better understand each other and nurture team spirit, the company regularly organises recreational activities, including overseas trips, outings and dinners. "We are not rank-conscious here," remarks Mr Ng. "Respect is commanded through calibre and compassion."

While a university degree definitely helps, Mr Ng says it is not a must for entry into the profession. Success depends more on attitude and determination than on qualifications. Nevertheless, staff armed with university degrees do tend to advance to team-leader positions faster than those without degrees.

Having witnessed the sales team grow from just 10 people to the current 250, Mr Ng is optimistic about magazine subscriptions. "We are seeing a growing demand for information. The print media still enjoys a strong connection with readers, in spite of the many multimedia choices on offer now. The mainland also represents unlimited opportunities," Mr Ng points out. "A career in sales offers great financial returns, but not everybody can make it. Every industry has a different formula for success, so it is important that you follow the direction of experienced managers."



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